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TechnoFeminism

What is it and why we do we need it?

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When did technology stop feeling whimsical and start feeling boring, dull, and lacking of any emotional value?

There was a moment in time during the early 2000s when there was a boom in aesthetically fun technology, more specifically known as Y2K futurism. Think: Tamagotchis, flip phones, and multi-colored CD players. Technology was treated similarly to a purse or a pair of sunglasses; it was an extension of one's personal style, and it functioned as an accessory. The question is, when did technology become lost to the minimalism movement?

Apple's release of the iPhone in 2007 arguably had the largest impact on the future of what technology would look like. At the time, their intentional minimalism and sleekness were something fresh and new; a response to the hyper-consumerism and color culture that boomed throughout the early 2000s. When Apple did it, it felt innovative. The problem emerged when every other tech company started to follow their footsteps, leading to a technological world aesthetically defined by a look that can only be described as sterile.

Now that we have been existing within the minimalist technological boom for well over a decade, Gen Z women are starting to fight against the mundanity of it all with *cyberdecks*. According to Forbes, cyberdecks are "a custom-made computer with a Cyberpunk-inspired design". In other words, they are essentially miniature computers built using single-deck computers or microcontrollers. Cyberdecks can be anything the creator wants it to be, whether it be a reading-device, a music player, etc. In a world where there is such an excess of digital-fatique, the cyberdeck becomes a new way to focus on one thing at a time, rather than having 20 tabs or applications open at once.

What is interesting about this phenomenon is that the pioneers behind it are women. This outcome makes sense for two main reasons: firstly, the phrase "adding a woman's touch" doesn't exist without reason. Women within modern-day society are expected to not only be beautiful themselves, but to also beautify the objects, products, and spaces that surround them. While men can do this as well, adding extravagance and whimsy to otherwise boring objects (whether that be bedding, the design behind a perfume bottle, or in this case, hand-held computers) definitely has a societal element behind it. Secondly, and arguably most importantly, women have historically been the ones on the front-end of handling coding and technological work.

Previously, coding was seen as something parallel to administrative or clerical work; the type of work that was perceived as simple, repetitive, and skillless. Some of the most-renowned coding pioneers have been women. Who wrote the first computer algorithm? Ada Lovelace, a woman. Who invented the compiler? Grace Hopper, a woman. Who designed the Tamagotchi? Aki Maita, once again, a woman! During the 1980s, coding became professionalized, leading it to become a field that was highly profitable. Personal computers started showing up in homes for the first time, and

were “coincidentally” advertised almost exclusively to boys and men. Earlier versions of the computer were not nearly as advanced, so they were marketed with the same appeal as gaming devices. Like most toys, they were sold predominantly to one gender. This shift of societal perception led men to step forward while simultaneously pushing female pioneers out of the field.

With so much daily technological development, we are seeing history repeat itself once again: women are not only being put on the back burner within the tech world, they are also facing significantly more negative implications from said technological advancements. Artificial Intelligence is arguably the most prevalent contemporary example; men are disproportionately running the modern technological ecosystem, while women are disproportionately harmed by AI. Not only can you use AI to create deepfakes, which is a revenge tactic typically aimed against women, AI is also causing significant environmental harm. While environmental ethics and feminism seem like they exist within separate worlds, they actually are systems that go hand in hand. According to ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva, women are socially coded and expected to have “nurturing” and maternal instincts, which is why women tend to be more environmentally conscious than men. It is natural that there is a major push against all of these technological advancements that seem to be defining the mid 2020s.

Women did not drift away from technology, they were systematically removed from it, and the world we got as a result speaks for itself: sterile devices, exploitative AI, and an industry that keeps treating women as an afterthought at best, and a target at worst. Technofeminism being on the rise is a clear natural reaction to the current world, particularly within feminism, the technological boom, and the environmental concerns that continue to raise every year. If there is any moment where we need women to re-enter the technological world, it is now.

Will you be building a cyberdeck?

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